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ABSTRACT

This paper describes conditions and processes involved in implementing school-based decision making (SBDM), examining an outcomes-driven developmental model (ODDM) and describing the training components within Springfield, Missouri's and Kentucky's strategic plans. The Springfield Board of Education approved a plan to guide a schoolwide community staff development process utilizing the ODDM process. The training developed a SBDM model to help each school achieve its goal of success for all students. In Kentucky, the changing political context at the school level provided the basis for a problem-based learning module for principals implementing Kentucky's school-based reform. A research project examined problems encountered in implementing SBDM in Kentucky and explored issues related to leadership, school and community empowerment, and principal training and preparation. SBDM helps move schools from a centralized system into a participative management mode by extending the principal's leadership role to many individuals who engage in ongoing dialogue. SBDM emphasizes school improvement and management at the building level. It involves administrators, teachers, parents, and community members in a team-building, consensus mode designed to create a school plan to produce improved student outcomes. As schools move to participative management, they must consider such issues as changes in the principal's role and the need to develop other leaders in the school community who can manage in a SBDM environment. Principals need specialized staff development to meet the new demands of legislated reform. (Contains 15 references.) (SM)

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IMPLEMENTING SCHOOL CENTERED DECISION MAKING

SUMMIT ON EDUCATION

NASHVILLE TENNESSEE

JUNE 1996

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The challenge of moving an organization from a structured, centralized system to a participative management mode clearly involves wide-based efforts to produce building-level, shared decision-making practices that impact student achievement and school performance. The change in the role of the principalship and the need to develop other leaders in the school community the need for schools to design a SBDM model that supports decentralization practices that lead to the development and implementation of a school improvement plan.

This paper identifies and describes the conditions and processes involved in the implementation of school-centered decision making. Specifically, an outcomes-driven developmental model is considered and the training components of the Springfield, Missouri and Kentucky strategic plans are examined

Two stated goals guided the inquiry in this project. The goals were (a) to develop a problem-based learning module that assists principals in learning how to build trust and shared vision/goals in the political context of implementing school-based decision making; and (b) to field test, assess, and revise this problem-based learning module.

In Ky, the changing political context at the school level provided the basis for the problem-based learning module for principals who are engaged in implementing Kentucky's school-based reform. The project drew on current problems encountered in the implementation of school-based decision making in Kentucky. These problems of practice were then considered in light of leadership and organizational theories as a means of developing a problem-based learning module for school-based leadership. Next, three topics that directly affect the implementation and effectiveness of school-certered decision-making in changing school governance are explored; (a) leadership, (b) school and community empowerment, (c) principal training and preparation.

The past decade marked a period of unprecedented change in the world. The intervals between changes have shortened and the pace at which change now occurs has quickened. The only constant is change.

To be successful in today's fast changing world schools are being required to adapt quickly and effectively. The need for innovation is not new, but never before has there been such an urgent demand to continually create new and better solutions. Change is a factor that every school must accept; how effectively change is implemented becomes more and more critical to the long-term success of schools. School-based decision making represents one effort to prepare schools with a structure that will facilitate change implementation (Fullan, 1991).

Decentralization/ participatory management proponents maintain that school-site autonomy, within the prescribed guidelines of the school district, will enable schools to develop improvement plans and practices that will maximize their community resources. Additional changes in governance structure are also incorporated through a shared decision-making format. The change process of SBDM is more than a concentrated effort of school improvement and management practices at the building level; it is a structural move at the central office level as well. The American Association of School Administrators' (1988) report, School-Based Management: A Strategy for Better Learning, reminds us that "while the role of central administrators may change, the need for them will not. Under a system of school-based management, central office administrators will provide leadership, support, information, and assistance to local schools" (p. 18)

The American Association of School Administrators (1989) characterizes school-based management and decision making as a plan that could increase the probability for the following outcomes:

(1) a form that stirs professional debate,
(2) decisions about resources, personnel, and programs that are more school relevant,
(3) providing appropriate learning opportunities for all students,
(4) students empowered for learning,
(5) breaking down teacher and administrator isolation,
(6) more collegiality,
(7) professional satisfaction, less burnout, stress, and
(8) school being continuously "reinvented."

Other positive outcomes could be that ownership and commitment by many would produce greater responsibility, higher quality; cooperation versus competition could produce greater gains; and that, when students observed adults engaged in productive, collaborative behavior, it will help teach them to acquire similar behaviors.

School-centered decision making (SBDM) helps move the school from a centralized system into a participative management mode by extending the well-established manager/leadership role of the principal to many individuals, all of whom engage in a dialogue, This, of course, sets the occasion for meaningful communication. Central office and school boards serve as support bases, while the school-site leadership team is afforded building autonomy not only in designing the improvement plan for

the school but also in developing the strategies necessary in meeting the objectives of the plan.

Decentralization centers on moving an organization from a structured, centralized system to a participative management mode. For years successful corporations have embraced participative management and transformed their organizations by (a) directing decision making downward, (b) empowering their workers, and (c) promoting team work (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Schlechty, 1990). Until recently, schools have operated within the framework of a centralized decision-making model. SBDM requires a new way of operating in schools and moves decision making from the central office to the building level (Beers, 1984; Caldwell & Wood, 1988 Clune & White, 1988; David, 1990; Goodlad, 1984; Guthrie, 1986; Marburger, 1985; Mojkowski & Fleming, 1988).

SBDM is a change process that focuses on school improvement and management at the building level. It is a process that includes administrators, teachers, parents, and community members operating in a team-building, consensus mode that is designed to create a school plan that will produce improved student outcomes. Despite the fact that this emerging model (SBDM) is rapidly gaining political and public notoriety, neither teachers nor principals are prepared or trained for this kind of structure (Barth, 1990; Hallinger & McCary, 1990; McCarthy & Pererson, 1989; Murphy, 1991; Murphy & Hallinger, 1987; Rallis, 1990). Few descriptive studies are available about how school communities and principals in particular make this transition while focusing on school improvement and management at the building level (Hansen & Liftin, 1991; Murphy, 1991; Rallis, 1990; Schlechty, 19900; Sergiovani, 1990). This study examined, through a case study approach, the transition of a school from a traditional mode of governance and management to a participatory mode.

There are important issues to consider as schools move from a centralized decision-making model to participative management. First, there is a change in the role of the principalship. Present-day principals typically are expected to function as instructional, managerial, and communication leader. However, they generally have been viewed, and often view themselves, as disseminators of central office directives. The principal often is responsible for addressing the needs derived from complex societal problems. Principals are expected to have expertise in the following areas: at-risk students, child abuse, breakfast programs, after-school care, parental involvement, business partnerships, drug and alcohol abuse, strategic

planning, computer technology, sex education, literacy, and legal issues. No doubt the mobilization of resources at the building level, combined with shared decision making, presents a dimension to the principalship that is uncommon among managerial roles. Thus, the principal's role shifts from a traditional, structured position to that of facilitator as the leadership role is extended to many individuals at the building level.

The second issue concerns the need to develop other leaders in the school community who can manage in a SBDM environment. Casner-Lotto (1988) reported that teachers in Hammond, Indiana have a major voice in developing educational programs and in making decisions formerly made solely by principals or central office staff. Decisions that traditionally were the responsibility of the principal or central office administration (e.g., scheduling, staffing needs, instructional strategies, etc.) are now being made in concert with teachers, parents, students, and administrators of school improvement teams. This shift and the subsequent change in responsibilities and roles afford teachers the opportunity for increased involvement that leads to leadership roles in shaping the direction of the school.

Given that individuals bring a wide range of personal experiences and values to the group setting, a systematic process and "an understanding of the decision-making process is vital to successful administration" (Hoy & Miskel, 1987, p. 351). However, Hoy and Miskel (1987) emphasized that positive or negative consequences will result not by whom is involved in the decision-making process but rather under what conditions groups of people are involved. Clearly, there is a need to develop a governance structure that supports effective decision-making practices for the entire school community.

The challenge of today's leaders centers on their expertise in guiding and promoting conditions that encourage leadership of the school community. Changes in leadership roles today encourage leaders to "discover and to promote conditions that allow the process of leadership to flourish" (Rallis, 1990, p. 186). When principals include students, teachers, parents, staff, business, and community partners in a collaborative decision-making process to improve student outcomes they have shifted their traditional role of primary decision maker to that of facilitator. This participatory style of management extends the leadership role to many individuals at the building level.

The principal's role now shifts as he or she guides the members of the school community in developing their leadership skills. It is imperative that the principals be skilled in instructional leadership functions that promote

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student learning. In addition, they must possess the skills required to set the occasion for collaboration and utilization of resources as they guide others into leadership roles.

Principals have called the pivotal figures for instructional leadership and change agents for school improvement (Bridges, 1992; Curran, 1982; Murphy, 1991). These principals require specialized staff development to meet the new demands of legislated reform (Gerritz, Koppick, & Gurhrie, 1984; Grier, 1987; Murphy, 1990; Murphy & Hallinger, 1993; National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, 1987). Like principals elsewhere, many Kentucky principals lack the skills to make the transition from past practice to school-based decision making. Thus, the preparation of practicing educational administrators for reform has taken on considerable importance in Kentucky.

Murphy (1991) identified the pressing need for improved educational experiences for school administrators. Murphy and Hallinger (1987) state that staff development for principals should be based on practice as well as theory. They maintain that training should be "hands on" and simulate as closely as possible actual problems that will be faced on the job. Participants should be actively involved in the learning process. Increasingly, scholars assert that staff development should reflect both the complexities of the principalship and address issues that emerge from the problematic context in which they work on the job (Bridges, 1990, 1992; Hallinger, 1992).

In January 1990, the Springfield, Missouri Board of Education gave final approval to a strategic plan that was developed by 428 staff members and patrons. This plan helped to guide the training of a schoolwide community staff development process utilizing the ODDM process. Thirteen action teams were formed to study and develop the Springfield public schools' beliefs, mission, parameters, objectives, and strategies that would set the occasion for success of all Springfield students. This training was the beginning for each Springfield school to develop a school-centered decision-making model that would help the district achieve its goal.

Schools need continually to seek the best fit between students and their learning environment. To reach this goal, individual principals and teachers require the flexibility that local decision making provides and the professional commitment that comes from having a hand in significant school-level decisions. School-based management is a strategy whose time has come. It weds the best thinking about modern management with the need to professionalize teaching. The result will be an enriched climate both

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for educators and for students . . . and better learning for all our nation's students.

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